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The Explorations and Experiences of the Path of Political Development with Chinese Characteristics

The “second revolution” led by Deng Xiaoping was manifested not only in the economic area, but also in the area of politics to some extent. Since the ideological emancipation movement before the convening of the 3rd plenary session of the 11th Central Committee in 1978, featured by the discussion of “Practice is the sole criterion for judging truth”, the Communist Party of China has conducted a series of political reforms, and confirmed the path of political development with Chinese characteristics. The exploration of the path of political development with Chinese characteristics has not only made it possible for China to carry out reforms within and outside the system, but also marked great achievements in political construction. The path of political development with Chinese characteristics and the achievements it brought serve as important experience for us to summarize the political reforms in China.

I. Political Reforms and Explorations of the Path of Political Development with Chinese Characteristics

Since the 1980s, political reforms in China can be divided into three stages: firstly, the political reform during the 1980s which was oriented by the separation of the Party from government; secondly, the political construction during the 1990s which was oriented by the enhancement of the Party’s governance capacity; and thirdly, the exploration of the path of political development with Chinese characteristics in the new era.

1. Separating the Party from government

The political elites in China after the “cultural revolution” consisted two groups of people, including Party cadres led by Deng Xiaoping who were liberated from the “cultural revolution” and the continuous political power of the “cultural revolution” led by Hua Guofeng. The latter could be changed through ideological emancipation. But for the old liberated cadres, how should the reform to be boosted? At that time, veteran Party cadres who suffered a lot from the “cultural revolution” had such a political consensus, Which is no tragedy like the “cultural revolution” should happen again. Against such a background, Deng Xiaoping made an important and famous speech, on the topic of *Reform of the Party and the State Leadership*, at an outreach session of the political bureau, in which Deng made a deep analysis of the “root fault”, that is “excessive concentration of power”, of the Chinese political system, and overall criticized the bureaucratic malpractice of “centralized Party leadership”, under which the Party was not separated from the government. It is safe to say that this speech constituted the whole guiding line of the political reforms during the 1980s.

Throughout the 1980s, both political and economic reforms were synchronized. A specific planning for political reforms was made at 13th National Congress of the CPC in 1987. According to the planning, the leading party groups in government departments would be cancelled; the functional departments of the Party committee which were counterparts to government departments would be cancelled; the Party's Politics and Law Committee would be cancelled and reformed into the Party's political leadership team; functions for the Party's

Commission for Discipline Inspection would be modified that the criminal function would be cancelled; and a system of social consultation and dialogue would be set up and the communication and dialogues between Party and emerging social organizations would be enhanced. As can be seen, the core of this overarching political reform was to separate the Party from government, aiming to make the government more independent and the principle of judicial independence truly being implemented. For the first time, it recognized the transformation of social structure and interest groups brought about by the reform and opening up.

After the 13th National Congress of the CPC, regional political reforms were launched as planned and competitive election of the leading Party cadres of the deputy provincial level was carried out in more than 20 provinces and cities in the new round of election during 1987—1988.

The Communist Party of China withstood the test of the political disturbance in 1989. However, other socialist countries and their communist parties encountered a completely different experience. In the era of globalization, a national event would easily evolve into a global event due to system similarity and interactivity. Firstly, it was in Eastern Europe, and then in Soviet Union, the first socialist country in the world, to see dramatic changes. The Berlin Wall fell down, the Soviet Communist Party collapsed, and Soviet Union dissolved. The political disturbance in China in 1989 and the dissolution of Soviet Union urged the Communist Party of China to reflect “How to deal with it”.

2. Strengthening the governance capability of the Party

Though “strengthening the governance capability of the Party” was

the theme of the 4th Plenary Session of the 16th Central Committee in September of 2004, the political disturbance in 1989 and the dissolution of Soviet Union in 1991 were the turning point from “separating the Party from government” to “strengthening the governance capability of the Party”. As pointed out in *Decision of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China on the Construction of the Party’s Governance Capability*, “the Party’s ruling status is neither innate, nor once for all”. The judgment not only a conclusion of the history of international communist movements, but also a respond to the practical challenges in China at that time.

When the top-down political reform lagged behind the economic reform, non-governmental organizations brought about by economic reform were booming, and the spontaneous villagers’ autonomy system was growing fast. That’s a kind of incremental political development.

This practice of consolidating the Party’s organizational institution structurally was natural and understandable in specific periods. However, a political system that gets along well with the economic system must be set up. After years of explorations, at the 15th National Congress of the CPC in 1997, “rule of law” was put forward clearly, followed by “political civilization”. The two complemented each other. “Rule by law” in the past has become “rule of law” currently and “political civilization” is on earth a civilization of “rule of law”, which is a special expression of constitutionalism in the Chinese context. “Rule of law” and “political civilization” is not only a renewal of concepts, but also an institutional innovation. Since the 15th National Congress of the CPC, there have been more and more accountability requirements to government’s behaviors; the public security staff strictly follow

procedures according to the “ruling of the police by the law”; and the phenomenon of “police’s collusion with the gangs” has reduced greatly. Those political measures thus safeguarded the construction of the socialist market economic system well.

Changes of the economic base will surely result in changes of the superstructure. There are two ways of changes in the superstructure, one is the passive change in the form of revolution and the other is positive change in the form of reform. The Chinese communists who always keep pace with the times chose the way of flexible reforms. In 2002, at the 16th National Congress of the CPC, the important thought of Three Represents was written into the Party Constitution. Always representing the requirements of the development of China’s advanced productive forces means accepting the reality of the coexistence of various economic elements; always representing the orientation of the development of China’s advanced culture means the acknowledgement of cultural diversity; and always representing the fundamental interests of the overwhelming majority of the people in China means that the Communist Party of China is the vanguard of not only the working class, but also all nationalities in China, expanding the Party’s mass basis from the traditional peasant and working classes to new social strata.

The important thought of Three Represents is a significant crystallization of comparatively political. A lot of revolutions in history were forced to break out outside the system because the old system could not tolerate new forces, leading to the collapse of the old regime. From this perspective, the important thought of Three Represents is not only an insightful understanding of historical experience by the Chinese communists, but also a sign of strong vitality of the Communist Party of

China itself.

3. Explorations of the path of political development with Chinese characteristics

When “strengthening the governance capability of the Party” was firstly put forward in 2004, profound changes had happened both to the interest structure and to people’s concepts. The ruling Party was faced with unprecedented challenges and opportunities. With the changes in the interest structure and people’s concepts, the governing model also saw enormous changes. Till the beginning of the new century, the autonomy-oriented villagers’ election had been widespread across the country; the new form of democracy within the Party like “open recommendation and open election” had been propelled orderly; and democracy had become a popular implore.



Party members from Wadian village, Hongyan township, Huaying city, Sichuan, were sincerely casting a vote to elect the standing party representatives of township on October 19, 2008

The report to the 17th National Congress of the CPC in 2007 systematically summarized the basic situation and experience of the political development in China since the launch of the reform and opening up 30 years ago, especially those in recent years, and put forward clearly for the first time the path of political development with Chinese characteristics, that is, propelling the development of people's democracy and achieving socialist democratic politics with inner-Party democracy on the basis of the national people's congress system, multi-party cooperation system of regional ethnic autonomy and grassroots democratic self-government system.

Hence, the path of political development with Chinese characteristics, is actually a response to how to construct the socialist democratic politics. According to the report to the 17th National Congress of the CPC, the construction of democratic politics in China mainly includes the following aspects: pushing forward the construction of democratic politics in state authorities, actively strengthening the construction of inner-Party democracy, developing grassroots democracy, carrying forward the scientification and democratization of decision-making, and perfecting the decision-making system and the restrictive and supervisory system.

II. Main Aspects of Political Reform and Political Construction

Great changes have happened to the appearance of Chinese politics after more than 30 years of political reforms and construction, some

fields even seeing revolutionary reforms, which are mainly happened to the leadership system of Party and state, the administrative management system and the relations between central and local authorities, as well as the relations between the state and the society.

1. The Party and state leadership system: towards to institutionalization and legislation

The signs of the rule by man are the Life-long tenure of the position and the personification in the policy procedure, which were common in China before the opening up. Since the 1980s, China has been gradually recovering and perfecting the Party and state leadership system, and going towards institutionalization and legislation. The Party and state leadership system is an overall name for the political system in China, which includes the Party itself and its relations with the people's congress, the military, the government, the judicial system and the society. In general, changes in the Party and state leadership system can be seen in the following major aspects.

Firstly, it is the retirement system. As mentioned above, the first collective retirement system in the history of the Communist Party of China was launched in 1985. In 1989, Deng Xiaoping retired, marking an official shake-off of Life-long tenure at the topmost posts in China and laying a foundation for later political progresses. At the 16th National Congress of the CPC held in 2002, the Party's third of central collective leadership with Comrade Jiang Zemin retired simultaneously, marking the official establishment of the system of fixed tenures at inner-Party posts.

Secondly, it is the legalization of Party wills. After Deng Xiaoping made the speech on the topic of *On the Reform of the Party and State*

Leadership System in 1980, the CPC Central Committee decided that Party committees at all levels should stop to issue any legal documents in the name of the Party; matters needing to be examined and approved by the people's congress or its standing committee in accordance with the Constitution and law must be submitted to the people's congress or its standing committee for examination and approval; that Party committees at all levels, when examining cadre candidates who need to pass legal procedure, must respect the opinions from the representative of the people's congress and its standing committee; and that the appointment and removal of national leaders must be in full accordance with the Constitution and follow the procedures prescribed by law, etc.

Thirdly, it is the administration by law and the establishment of accountable government. For years, the CPC Central Committee and the State Council of China have taken a series of measures to effectively push forward the administration by law and constantly speed up the construction of a government featuring the rule of law. Currently, the operation of administrative powers by governments at all levels has been gradually put into the orbit of the rule of law; the legal system to regulate the obtainment and operation of government power has formed initially; and important progresses have been achieved about the administration by law and the building of accountable government.

With the reforming and building of the Party and state leadership system, the functions of people's congress are no longer limited to legislation, but its supervisory function is also being reinforced. As an institutional arrangement to connect the Party with the society, the multi party cooperation system has attracted much attention because of non-Party figures beginning to take important leading posts. In

addition, the development of inner-Party democracy, the transparency and openness of the system of Party controlling cadres, and the expansion of the autonomy in enterprises and public utilities are milestones of legalization progress of the Party and state leadership system.

2. Administrative reform; self-revolution of the government

In the process of restoring the order after the “cultural revolution”, departments of the State Council of China once reached more than 100 at most. It was the product of the planned economy, within which, government departments were set for industries and products accordingly. It obviously could not meet the requirements of the reform and opening up, especially the requirement the socialist market economy. For this reason, China has conducted several institutional reforms since the reform and opening up, and proposed clearly to set up the “super-ministries system”.

Administrative reform includes not only restructuring, but also the transformation of government functions and the transition of government behaviors. In the pursuit of adapting to the market economy, entrepreneurial government was once popular, while service-oriented government is proposed in China currently. Regardless of the type of the government, the most important thing is the legalization of government behaviors. In recent years, legalization of government behaviors in China are mainly reflected in open legislation, routinization of administrative decision-making, reform of the administrative examination and approval system and the implementation of the Administrative Licensing Law of the People’s Republic of China. On the

basis of implementing the Administrative Licensing Law, China boosted the reform of the administrative examination and approval system, reduced and regulated administrative examination and approval. Up to October 2007, the State Council of China had nullified and modified, in four batches, 1,992 administrative examination and approval items, and provincial governments nullified and modified more than 22,000 administrative examination and approval items, both accounting for over half of the original ones.

Legalization of government behaviors is a result of active government demand, a “self-revolution”, and a choice and process in face of various pressures.

3. Relations between the central and local governments: political unitary system and economic federalism

China was a typical state with a unitary government system before the launch of reform and opening up. For political matters, the Organization Department of the CPC Central Committee directly controlled all Party cadres above the department or bureau level; for the public finance, a system of centralized revenue and expenditure was implemented; as for the power of administration, even building a public toilet in a city needed the approval of the competent authority. The reform and opening up led to a political-economy dual situation combined by political unitary system and economic federalism.

The Chinese politics and economy show a duality tendency currently. As known to all, the most central indicator to measure the relations between the central and local governments is the fiscal system. From the “big pot” finance with centralized revenue and expenditure in the era of the planned economy, to the fiscal responsibility system in the

1980s, then to the system of tax division between central and local governments launched across China since 1994, the fiscal system in China has seen revolutionary changes. Under such a fiscal system, it has become a new institutional arrangement that local governments play the role of stakeholders instead of agents in the past, and the market plays a leading instead of auxiliary role. The theoretical discourse to such institutional arrangement is “fiscal federalism”, even “economic federalism”.

The politics-economy dual structure brought a new challenge to state governance when the “old vertical governance structure” met with the new “horizontal governance structure”, a metaphor for local governments that had been fiscally federalized. More seriously, under the principle of setting departments according to government levels, some departments may be captured to be the tool for protecting local interests since economic federalism had greatly strengthened the administrative authorities of local governments, which directly dissipated economic resources, the foundation of state power, even legal authority, the will of the state.

To solve the problem above, the governance strategy should contain at least three key points:

Firstly, to boost further administrative reforms to rationalize the relations between “vertical” and “horizontal” governance, which had become a home truth truism, yet not straightened out clearly.

Secondly, to change the practice of setting government departments within the planned economic system which is from the topmost to the lowest level. In market economy, there is no further need for the existence of economic management departments locally, especially in

municipal or county levels. Since state-owned enterprises at the municipal and county levels have become faint, it makes the industry- and product-based departments existing in name only; meanwhile economic operation relies more and more on the national macro-control policies. Therefore, the space of streamlining the functional departments in local governments is huge. Unfortunately, due to the drag of the traditional thoughts, some newly-set systems, such as Agricultural Development Bank of China, trying to set functional departments to the lowest level, to be specific, to the county level. The practice of setting functional departments to the lowest level not only swelled government agencies, making the local government finances to payroll finance, but also changed a number of local functional departments into defacto tools for regional protectionism.

Thirdly, conduct power centralization and decentralization to appropriate degree. Some powers, like local administrative power, need to be decentralized; some need to be centralized, such as the judicial and law enforcement systems which serve to implement national wills. The logic of reforms in China is beginning with and thoroughly full with power decentralization. However, in some fields, it is not the more the power is decentralized the better the effectiveness will be, but higher power centralization is needed usually. Powers in the judicial and law enforcement systems have to be centralized during economic decentralization and administrative devolution. Administrative power is more regionally, thus needs to be decentralized; while laws are more national, thus need to be centralized. Not only in China, a country of the unitary system, even in America, a typical federal country, both the judicial and law enforcement powers are centralized, being more national

than regional. The judicial system and environmental enforcement system should be reconstructed like the system of the People's Bank of China, and mature experience in other countries should be learned from.

4. Growth outside the system: the new relations between the state and the society

State originates from the society. State has to manage its affairs in and only in its domination, while the society has to retain its own independent space. Bound has to be set between the state and the society. However, before China launched the reform and opening up policy, the state involved the whole people into its political, economic, cultural and military systems through the systems of units, household registration, as well as of food and clothing coupon, which were typical means of the planned economy. At that time, the state submerged the society, individuals lost their basic freedom and creativity, and the whole country lost its vitality.

Since the reform and opening up, for the need of economic and social restructuring and state governance, the Party and the government have gradually and prudently withdrawn from fields that were once put under strict control, passed them on the autonomy of the civil society, and allowed groups with common interests to form associations. According to official statistics, in the recent decade, non-governmental organizations (mainly including social groups, non-governmental non-enterprise entities and foundations) have been developing rapidly, increasing from 184,000 in 1996 to 446,000 in 2010.

As new modern social organizations, non-governmental organizations keep active interactions with the government on the basis of maintaining

basic autonomy. But meanwhile, they are faced with the plight in aspects of law, human sources, funds, trust, knowledge and technologies, resulting in a weak position in the political procedure. Even though, when interest demands can't be met or achieved simply relying on individual power and resources, some citizens found associations to make use of the resources and means available to try to get involved in the political procedure so as to express their interest appeals. For example, in the process of reviewing the draft of the Postal Law of the People's Republic of China, a number of express companies in Shanghai where the private express industry is developed elected representatives to go to Beijing and ally many relevant departments. Of course, in the political procedure of China, whether the interest appeals of non-governmental organizations could be entered into the political system and whether they could be realized at a certain degree ultimately depend on the will of the government. Both the successful and unsuccessful cases show that the government still has an absolute advantage over the society, and the decision-making power is still in the hand of the state and the government. In addition, in local governance, some non-governmental organizations, especially those in the developed costal areas, play a role of gathering and expressing their members' interests well. In Wenzhou, chambers of commerce have intervened in the regionally governance of public affairs with their unique organizational advantage, and become a bottom-up organizational force different from national power, exerting significant impacts on social operation, even government decision-making and goals.

Compared with the emerging non-governmental organizations, the influence coming from the rise of the Internet on the Chinese politics

deserves more concern. Like most countries of the world, the social and economic restructuring and economic growth in China have motivated citizen participation in China, while economic growth and the increase of the citizens' needs for participation have pushed forward the systematic construction of the Chinese government. Different from developed countries and countries which have completed the transition earlier, the political and economic relations in China, which are similar to those in other countries, encounter with the Internet, a totally strange thing to other countries in their transition. The unprecedented technological revolution brings a major challenge for the development of the Chinese politics, as well as providing a new platform for citizen participation in China.

The emergence of the Internet provides a possibility for reconstructing of public domain. The force of public opinions on the web sometimes is extremely powerful, sufficient to make important changes to events and figures in order to highlight its great influence. The topics of cyber citizens' participate in the Internet focus on public policies, citizen rights, nationalism, personal interests and emotional catharsis, etc. The participation in public policies, citizen rights and nationalism related activities is a sort of ideal participation, which does not exclude venting resentment; participation for personal interests is a typical interest-oriented participation; while activities for pure emotional catharsis belongs to resentment vent-oriented participation.

The Internet has become a major public domain, even a new-type citizen society, which could be named society of cyber-citizens. However, the virtuality of the society of cyber citizens serves as an important premise for the cyber citizens' mass participation in politics.

To sum up, changes of the political relations mentioned above mean that it is no longer appropriate to use traditional concepts of politics, such as authoritarianism or post-totalitarianism, to analyze the political situation in China. These concepts are static in Western politics, whose fundamental criterion is competitive election, and the political procedure and the politics-economy relations are not taken into consideration. Seen from the political procedure, is the politics which can change policy orientation and set new policy agenda not democratic? Seen from the politics-economy relations, is the emergence of the interest group politics not a parameter of democratic politics? Therefore, a better way is not to analyze what is going on with China or whether China is right with specific and fixed concepts, but to test, with China experience, whether specific theories and concepts are explanatory or applicable.

III. Basic Experience in Political Reform and Development

The more than 30 years of reform and opening up (including political reforms) has made China a great power with rich people. Despite corruption, social injustice, the gap between the rich and poor and the issues about agriculture, rural areas and farmers left in the development, no one could deny the great achievements made by China in the past more than 30 years and the significant contribution of the reform and opening up. Well then what is the successful experience of China?

1. Political stability is the premise of reform and development

Comparative political development theory draws a basic conclusion: being unable to maintain basic government power will lead to the loss of the leading force for political reforms. Huntington's political development theory is more directly, "political development without political authority and order is political recession." That's why Huntington pays more attention to the significance of political stability and institutionalization.

Comparing with the others, China is a huge developing country, to which political stability is especially important. This has become a political common sense. Though simple, it is testing the state theory regarding the growth of a nation state. As a country in the cultural sense, China is

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ancient; but as a modern nation state, it is too young. It's less than 100 years since the Revolution of 1911. As a growing modern state, China is still facing with a series of problems in the construction of a modern state, such as rational distribution of wealth and protection of civil rights. The basic experience in successful construction of a nation state includes: a stable institutional structure to condense national authority and a leading political force to organize the institutional construction of the state. Perhaps few people would deny that the Communist Party of China is the only leading force capable to accomplish the construction of nation state, and that the leadership of the Communist Party of China

relates to the stability of the country.

2. Concepts are an important force for leading the reform and opening up

In China, under the constitutional stability of the institutional structure, changes in institutional arrangements lead to dramatic changes in economic performance. What force it is that pushes forward the reform of institutional arrangements of a specific structure?

Concepts shape the institution, so institutional changes are inseparable from the guidance of ideological concepts. Those concepts resulting in institutional changes should experience the process of being learned, acknowledged, discussed, accepted or inventively modified. The evolution of concepts to institution is quite complicated. In economic reforms, the “market economy” was illegal before being legalized and institutionalized, which better interprets the complex relations between concepts and institutional changes. In the area of politics, “Three Represents”, “the rule of law”, “political civilization”, “the Scientific Outlook on Development”, as well as human rights and governance, etc. are all new concepts and ideas to solve the related questions, and great developments of and contribution to Marxism. In one word, the reform and opening up in China is inseparable from the guidance of progressive new concepts.

Who is the holder of the above concepts which changed China? Undoubtedly, it is the ruling party. Changes in concepts further highlight the adaptability of the Communist Party of China in front of us. Many changes since the reform and opening up have happened to the Communist Party of China. The basic features of the ruling party has to

consist of having universal governing goals, an open mass foundation, ideology advancing with the times, political mentality legitimacy, institutionalized organization building and a legalized ruling style. To become a ruling party with the above basic features, the Communist Party of China has to maintain its usual unique adaptability to the environment, and make theoretical and practical innovations so as to gain a greater vitality. To better adapt to the new environment, the Communist Party of China has to build up a sensitive information feedback mechanism to the domestic and international environments, and build a perfect supervision feedback mechanism to enable the top Party leadership to deal with the new environment in political consensus.

3. Progressive system innovation is the fundamental guarantee for the success of the reform and opening up

Under a stable institutional structure and the guidance of progressive concepts, institutional innovation is not only the reason for the success of the reform and opening up in China, but also an institutional guarantee for success. “Institution” here mainly refers to middle-level institutional arrangements, which include organizations themselves and relations among different organizations, such as those between the government and enterprises and among governmental departments.

In political reforms, institutional innovation is an up-down interaction process to break through the restraints of the old system (the planned economy) and the old concepts (dogmatism). The practice of institutional innovation by local governments, after being affirmed by

the central government, would be launched at selected points before becoming institutional legal provisions. The innovation of the land system or the villagers' autonomy system in the politics, is basically such a process of good interaction.

However, institutional innovation in the field of politics must be progressive. Since both men and organizations live under a social structure consisting of politics, the economy and culture, the former two of which may change easily, but it would be very difficult to change culture. Only being adaptive to culture and the political mentality shaped by culture could institutional changes be continued and sustainable. In the history of institutional changes, many disasters happened because rapid changes destroyed the social structure, which serves as the anchor of men and organizations. It's safe to say that the political development in China is progressive changes on the whole, within which an incremental structure is formed.

One standpoint of the political development in China is how to protect civil rights. Like economic rights, the realization of political rights has to be fought by the public, though the government also protects and increases citizen's political rights as it does in protecting citizen's economic rights. In the past more than 30 years, either policy switches, or the emergency of new forms of democracy or the innovation of the governance structure was driven by the spontaneous citizen participation, demonstrating a feature of a spontaneous order. However, comparing with the spontaneous economic order, the political order presents more "human design" and state power characteristics, making it more difficult and costing more time to be changed.

Therefore, as regard to political rights and political order, China

are showing appropriate prudence and progressiveness. Above all a country's history, culture and the national condition are important to how much liberty and democracy the country has to have, what path it should take to reach liberty and democracy, how its liberty and democracy progresses is going, etc.

The Road of China

Chapter 3

The Explorations and Development of Socialist Cultural with Chinese Characteristics